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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2865
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1212
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3252
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2638
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000130

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/11/2019

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SUBJECT: UKRAINIAN AMBASSADOR IN BISHKEK: CLOSING MANAS
WOULD BE TRAGEDY FOR EVERYONE

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Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador met with Ukrainian Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan Vladimir Solovei to gauge the CIS reaction to the potential closure of Manas Air Base. Solovei claimed that his CIS colleagues do not believe that the Air Base will leave Kyrgyzstan, nor do they want it to leave. Rather, the CIS ambassadors agree that the best advice to the Kyrgyz is to gouge the Americans, and then settle. If the U.S. actually does leave, Solovei said that it would be a tragedy for all concerned, giving license to Islamic extremist groups, which would eventually penetrate Russia, and also would increase narcotrafficking. Solovei confirmed what Embassy has heard from other sources: Kyrgyzstan wants more money for the Base, but the Russians are also exerting pressure. According to Solovei, what matters to Bakiyev is the promise of 150 million dollars in ready money; the rest of the Russian money may never come. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Ambassador met with Ukrainian Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan Vladimir Solovei to gauge the CIS reaction to President Bakiyev's announcement that Kyrgyzstan would close Manas Air Base. Solovei has a reputation for working closely with the Kyrgyz Government, and he maintains a close relationship with Russian Ambassador Valentin Vlasov. While relations between Ukraine and Russia are disputatious at the national level, Solovei and Vlasov are on very good terms personally, and are often seen downing vodka together at local events.

Advice for Kyrgyz: Gouge, then Settle

13. (C) Solovei said that among his CIS colleagues, no one believes that the U.S. will actually leave, and they do not in fact want the Base to close. With a surprising bluntness, he said that the CIS ambassadors agree that the best advice to the Kyrgyz government is to gouge the Americans for as

much as they can get, and then settle. Solovei asked the Ambassador if the U.S. would indeed close the Base if the Kyrgyz Government's demands this and was visibly taken aback when the Ambassador responded in the affirmative. She explained that the Base Agreement extends until 2011, but that there is a clause for terminating the agreement with six months notice that the Kyrgyz side could invoke. Somewhat desperately, Solovei suggested: "Why not use some good lawyers? Surely you have a lot of attorneys who could tie this up in an international court for years?" Ambassador replied that she knew of no such plans and that if Kyrgyzstan asked the U.S. to leave, it would.

A Tragedy for Everyone

¶4. (C) Reluctantly taking on board the possibility that the Coalition Air Base might close, Solovei sadly admitted, "That would be a tragedy for everyone." Solovei said that in his time in Kyrgyzstan, he had personally noted the increasing activity of Islamic extremist groups, spurred along by Saudi funding for the construction of mosques, and that they were spreading out of the South and into the North. He said that the presence of the U.S. has put a damper on that activity, but closing the Air Base would be interpreted as a sign of weakness, from which the Taliban and Hizb ut-Tahrir would take heart. Ambassador responded that she had noted the crowds of triumph by Muslim activists in the local press, and asked Solovei, "Don't the Russians understand that closing the Base is bad for the region, and could well lead to increased problems in Chechnya?" Solovei responded that the Russians are very emotional, and they do not always pursue their national interests in a rational way. They feel that

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in recent years, the U.S. has never missed a chance to humiliate them, in particular by recognizing Kosovo and attempting to establish a missile shield on their borders, and now, they are emotionally set on finding a way to score a blow against the U.S.

First Ukraine, then Kyrgyzstan

¶5. (C) Ambassador noted that the U.S. and Russia have a great deal of common interest in fighting terrorism, and that President Obama is actively seeking ways to engage partners in the struggle, both in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Solovei responded that he agreed fully that the U.S. and Russia have common interests, but that the Russian approach to the Base is wholly reflective of what they have done in Georgia, and with Ukraine over natural gas. "They've won the public relations war on gas transmission, and now the EU thinks that we're vipers." Solovei continued that Russia wants to break Ukraine away from the EU, even though that may well result in chaos and economic instability -- not a desirable state of affairs for a neighbor. Drawing his comparison of Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine to a close, Solovei predicted that if Manas Air Base closes, Kyrgyzstan's political situation could rapidly destabilize. Ambassador pondered the implications of such political uncertainty on the utility of having a base here if Kyrgyzstan is so unstable. Solovei commented that if the Russians would agree to keeping the Base open, the situation would be stable.

Dazzled by Presents

¶6. (C) Ambassador asked Solovei what he knew of the Kyrgyz game plan. Solovei demurred describing it as a plan, characterizing it more as children scrabbling for presents. Confirming what the Embassy has heard from other sources, Solovei said that the announcement of the Base closure came about in part because the Kyrgyz government wants more money for it, and in part because of Russian pressure. But the main reason that the Kyrgyz government finally acquiesced was

the prospect of an immediate cash payment of 150 million dollars from Russia: He described the Kyrgyz as dazzled children who were nearly overcome with joy at the presents the Russians were dangling in front of them. Solovei claimed that what is most important to Bakiyev from the Russian package is the cash, so that he can fund his reelection efforts. Solovei dismissed the loan forgiveness and the 1.7 billion dollar loan, saying that the Russians will probably not follow through on their promise: "Kyrgyzstan will never see it."

Comment

17. (C) Solovei is probably an outlier among the CIS ambassadors in his enthusiasm for Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan, so his assertion that his colleagues universally advise the Kyrgyz to "gouge, then settle" should be treated with caution. We also doubt that Russian Ambassador Valentin Vlasov agrees with what Solovei kept describing as his "CIS colleagues'" point of view.
GFOELLER